

**This Week in Congress**

February 19, 2007

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find this newsletter useful.

**Introducing Legislation to Ease Agricultural Trade Restrictions with Cuba**

This week, I introduced legislation to increase the ability of U.S. agriculture producers to market their products to Cuba. H.R. 1026, the Agricultural Export Facilitation Act of 2007, removes barriers to present and future sales of U.S. agricultural products to Cuba. The introduction of this legislation comes after I joined other Members for a Congressional delegation visit to Cuba in December to meet with Cuban government, trade and religious leaders.

With the stepping aside of Cuban dictator Fidel Castro, this is an opportune time to encourage the United States to change its trade policies toward Cuba. Cuba is an important market for U.S. agriculture, as well as for manufacturers and distributors of food products. But the actions of our own government have created a climate of uncertainty and have inhibited the sale of agricultural goods. Our unreliable and uncertain trade policies are sending the signal to Cuba that it is easier to purchase its products elsewhere. We are only hurting ourselves.

To read more about this legislation and to listen to audio I recorded on this topic, [click here](#) .

### **House Passes Tax Relief for Small Businesses in Kansas and Iraq Resolution**

The House this week passed legislation that will provide needed tax relief to small businesses in Kansas. This bill extends and expands the Work Opportunity Tax Credit that allows employers to claim a tax credit if they hire disabled veterans, high-risk youths, and other individuals from nine target groups. It also allows companies to expense more of their assets when investing in equipment, which encourages growth to our economy. Also, current law provides restaurant owners a credit for taxes paid on tips received that exceed the minimum wage. This legislation makes the adjustments necessary to compensate for an expected increase in the minimum wage, hopefully lessening the impact on small businesses.

The House also approved a resolution disapproving of President Bush's plan to deploy 20,000 additional troops to Iraq. America's involvement in Iraq is an important issue facing our country and it will be a topic of much discussion in Congress this year. The Senate is expected to consider this legislation later in the session.

### **Hays Veterans Clinic Hires Physician**

I received good news this week that Dr. Olivia Fondoble will be joining the staff of the Veterans Affairs (VA) Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in Hays. I have encouraged the VA to hire a doctor at the Hays clinic and I am pleased northwest Kansas veterans will now have access to enhanced health care. Dr. Fondoble will start on February 26. She is board certified in internal medicine and was born and raised in Hays. I appreciate the work of Tom Sanders, Director of the VA Medical Center in Wichita, in hiring a physician for the Hays clinic and for his dedication and service to all Kansas veterans.

### **Recognizing Young Kansas Artists in the Congressional Art Competition**

On Saturday, I presented awards to young Kansas artists for the Congressional Art Competition in a ceremony at the Hutchinson Arts Center in Hutchinson. Each year, I host the Congressional Arts Competition for Kansas high school students.

This year's competition was divided into six categories: painting, drawing, printing, mixed media, computer art and photography. Hannah Beattie of Little River received best of show for her pastel drawing entitled *Handpicked*. Hannah's artwork will be on display this year in the U.S. Capitol.

First place in the drawing category went to Lane Porter of McPherson and honorable mention went to Roxanne Nelson of Little River. In the painting category, Patrick Calvillo of Hutchinson received first place and Marsha Sterneker of McPherson received honorable mention. Receiving first place in photography was Casey Wedel of Goessel and honorable mention went to Aleesha Hines, also of Goessel. In the printing category, Brooke Evans of Grainfield-Wheatland received first place and Sarah Emigh of Grainfield-Wheatland received honorable mention. First place in mixed media went to Clera Nelson of Newton and honorable mention went to Josefa Andrade of Newton. Receiving first place in computer art was Apryl Schmucker of Little River and honorable mention went to Joseph Walton of Newton.

Congratulations to all of the winners and participants in this year's competition. I would also like to thank the Hutchinson Arts Center and director David Murano for hosting the competition this year and for judging the entries.

### **Presenting Walter McCormick of Syliva with Korean War Medals**

Also on Saturday, I presented Walter McCormick of Sylvia his medals for his service in the United States Navy during the Korean War. Mr. McCormick worked as a gunner's mate and Master at Arms during the war. I presented him with the Republic of Korea War Service Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, the Korean Service Medal, the United Nations Service Medal, the Good Conduct Medal and the Combat Action Ribbon.

Friends and family attended the presentation at the VFW Hall in Stafford. Mr. McCormick and his wife of almost 53 years, Helen, live in Sylvia where he worked for area farmers and they raised their five children.□

### **Continuing the First District Listening Tour**

I am continuing my listening tour this week. Tomorrow, I will be in Council Grove in Morris County, Strong City in Chase County and Emporia in Lyon County. On Wednesday, I will make stops in Sublette in Haskell County, Cimarron in Gray County and Jetmore in Hodgeman County. On Friday, I will be in Hamilton in Greenwood County. Next Monday, I will visit Plains in Meade County and Liberal in Seward County. [Click here](#) to view times and locations and to stay up-to-date on other tour stops still being scheduled.

## **In the Office**

Kenny Gorman of Topeka, James Morton of Dodge City, Chet Pinkston of Wichita and Scott Howard of Kansas City were in the office with the Kansas Fraternal Order of Police to talk about eliminating the unfair Government Pension Offset to Social Security. I am a cosponsor of H.R. 82, a bill that will do just that. Jason Cupp of Olathe, Karl Schottler of Shawnee, and Robert Patrick and Tracy Strohm of Lenexa with Kansas H2B Contractors came in to request support for increasing the number of H2B Visas that can be issued. Kari Bruffet with the University of Kansas Hospital stopped by to give an update on the hospital's role in the Medicaid program and the status of graduate medical education in Kansas.

Ross and Pat Marshall of Merriam were in with the Partnership for the National Trails System to talk about ways Congress can support scenic and historic trails. Tracey Winters of Vermillion stopped by the office to express the importance of funding prevention programs like the Regional Prevention Center of Northeast Kansas. Cetinkaya and Mehmet Barut of Wichita were in with the Institute of Interfaith Dialogue to bring me up to date on activities they have sponsored. Marian Adams of Wichita was in with the Taxpayer Advocate Service to describe ways to reduce Americans' tax burden.

President Ed Berger and Trustee Bud Janner of Hutchinson were in the office to discuss the need to renovate the current Science building at Hutchinson Community College into a Physical and Biotechnology Science Center to better prepare students for health-related professions. Karrina Brasser of Wichita and Doug Garman of Topeka were in with the Kansas Narcotics Officer Association to describe how federal grants for drug prevention efforts are vital to the health of our communities.

Linda Ogden of Hillsboro, Jodie Beisner and Colleen McClellan of Salina, Richard and Liz Scott of Strong City, Neysa Aiken of Hays and Teresa Walters of Emporia stopped by to discuss the importance of funding prevention and recovery services and the need for safe and drug free schools and communities programs. Vern and Carol Osborne of St. George were in the office to seek support for preservation of the Oregon and California trails.

Allan and Deanna Sents of McPherson, Brandy Carter of White City and Lynae Beam of Cuba were in to discuss Kansas Cattleman's Association legislative priorities. The Kansas Medical Society was in the office week to discuss pay for performance issues, the tax credit approach to health care and the need to reauthorize the State Children's Health Insurance Program. In with the group were Dr. Charles and Nancy Craig and Dr. Donna Ewy of Newton; Dr. Richard Warner, Dr. Michael Hettinger and Dr. James Appelbaum of Shawnee Mission; Dan Morin, Nancy Sullivan and Dr. Lambert Wu of Topeka; Jacque Amspacker of Johnson; Jon Rosell of Wichita; Karla Degner of Hutchinson; and Mary Jeter of Hays.

Dick Allen, CEO of Mercy Regional Health Center, of Manhattan was in to discuss health care issues and express concerns with any Administration plan to reduce hospital reimbursement under Medicare and Medicaid. Sherwood Applegate of Wichita was in with the Kansas Association of Letter Carriers to talk about issues important to the U.S. Postal Service. Dr. Andrew Allison of Topeka stopped by to discuss the problems Medicaid applicants are experiencing with the new proof of citizenship requirements and the challenges the Kansas Health Policy Authority face in trying to process the paperwork.

Jim and Sandra Haskell of Hutchinson stopped by my Washington, D.C., office for a tour of the

United States Capitol building.

Very truly yours,

Jerry